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THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

OCTOBER 1ST, 1863.

AN AUTUMN GOSSIP ON MUSIC.

By HENRY C. LUNN.

Author of "*Musings of a Musician*."

WITH the last notes of the London Musical Season still lingering in our ears, it is difficult to arrange our thoughts in anything like order on the various performances which have taken place; and it is not until the sea breezes and green fields have taken us for a time from the world of music, that we are enabled to think more largely on the subject than we are disposed to do in the opera-house or the concert-room. Criticism in the season is minute by necessity—the mind being solely occupied by the especial pieces that we are hearing, and the especial performers who are interpreting them—and so rapidly do these events succeed each other, that little time is given to reflect upon the general character of the entertainments we are so constantly listening to.

Removed, however, from all these influences, thoughts of art, apart from artists, crowd upon us; and we feel that we can now calmly and dispassionately gossip with those who will hear us in the spirit with which we address them.

In order to understand how rapid has been the progress of music in England, it is necessary to carry our thoughts back to the time when the art was solely represented by those exclusive institutions, the King's Theatre, the Ancient Concerts, the Philharmonic, and a few benefit concerts, given only by those professors who could sufficiently command the patronage of the higher classes to make them remunerative. The opera-box was then an aristocratic lounge—a drawing-room in which a fashionable *conversazione* was held twice a week. The Ancient Concerts, supported by directors who judged of compositions as they judged of their port wine—by age—plodded on through many weary years, mainly continuing their existence through the influence of a few noble martyrs who dutifully slept through the performance, after having entertained a select party of their fellow-sufferers at dinner. The Philharmonic—that gentle nurse of art, tending and fostering it into healthful life—nobly sustained its original intention; and whatever may now be its defects or shortcomings, we cannot but love it for the good it has done. Benefit concerts in these times were concerts in which a professor proved his right to his position; and these annual gatherings were looked forward to by those who desired to testify by their presence at his concert the estimation in which they held the concert-giver.

In contrasting the state of music in the present day with that of the time which we have de-

scribed, we cannot but feel that the breaking down of the barriers which had hitherto held the multitude back has been of infinite service to the art. The history of music in England has shown us that *dilettante* patronage in by-gone years, although upholding music and preventing its decline, did but little to develop and strengthen it; and it was not in fact until cheap operas and cheap concerts were firmly established that we could really say we were moving onwards. It is therefore only now, when we know that the public has a real voice in the matter, and music is steadily making its way as a popular art, that we feel a desire to enquire a little into the nature of the entertainments provided, and the manner in which those entrusted with their management fulfil the duties of their office.

The present state of the Opera we can have little to say against; for perhaps in no musical institution in England has so much reform been carried out. Where *ballet* held so prominent a place as it did for years in that luxurious palace in the Haymarket, there can be little doubt that music suffered. The notes of the *prima donna*, and the steps of the *première danseuse*, bore an equal value in public estimation; and many of the audience who could not come to the opera arranged their engagements so as to be regularly present at the *ballet*.

Those who can recall these days to mind will vividly remember how much the success of the opera-house, as a commercial speculation, depended upon the engagement of a favorite dancer; and the exorbitant terms demanded by these pets of the public rendered it impossible, therefore, that a lyrical drama could be presented to the subscribers as complete in every department as we have been lately accustomed to. Where dancing, too, was elevated almost into one of the fine arts in the columns of the daily press, it was not to be wondered at that the taste for music should advance but slowly; and the consequence was that, whilst the same operas were presented night after night, and season after season, without the slightest attention to scenery or stage effect, *ballets* were produced with the utmost care, and dandies strutted about in "*Taglioni*" overcoats.

That all this was detrimental to the healthful progress of music may be judged by the result. We are not now questioning whether the artists of these times were as great or greater than those of the present day—we do not even say that the operas produced then were not on an average equal to those produced now—but this we most unhesitatingly affirm, that from the time when the opera-house ceased to be a mere lounging place for the upper classes, the *ballet* declined, and the lyrical drama revived.

That the establishment of the Royal Italian Opera at Covent Garden had much to do in effecting this result there can be little doubt. It

had long been felt that the exclusive character which had so long attached to what may be called the Court Opera, was too deeply rooted to yield to any outward pressure for reform. The system of making every seat except the best as uncomfortable as possible continued to be the rule; and the gallery (originally intended for servants) remained, as before, the only place where a poor devotee could smuggle himself into the temple.

A new opera-house, therefore, gave an impetus to the cause which could have been effected in no other way; and the public, seeing in this enterprise a blow at the purely aristocratic system which had so long reigned supreme, at once took up arms in the struggle, and the Haymarket and Covent Garden became rivals for the throne of operatic art.

The beneficial influence of this artistic war became now apparent; and the lassitude which had hitherto prevailed at the old establishment was brought out in glaring contrast with the vigour displayed by its youthful rival. Opera, with a perfection of detail hitherto unknown in England, was presented night after night at Covent Garden; for as it was no longer necessary that music should be propped up by dancing, the management was enabled to devote its entire attention to the legitimate object of the establishment—the best means of presenting the lyrical drama.

From this time the standard operas became as well known to the middle classes as the standard plays; and vocalists were discussed in place of actors. The Drama declined as the Opera rose; and whilst the best works were performed in operatic establishments, the theatres were given over to “screaming farces” and burlesques.

When we consider the enormous expense of an opera-house conducted upon liberal principles, it would be useless to calculate upon the possibility of the public being admitted to every part of the house at very low prices. A certain subscription, which may be looked upon as a grant from the upper classes, seems absolutely necessary for its support; but there can be no reason why those seats set apart for the general public, who in fact contribute largely to its funds, should not be treated with due respect by the management. The poor prisoner in the tale of the “Iron Shroud,” who saw one window less in his dungeon every morning when he rose, could not have been more surprised and terror-stricken than the poor music-lover at the opera, who sees the seats in the pit gradually lessen, one by one, until he begins to fear that he shall be almost imperceptibly pressed out of existence. So great a want of consideration towards those who pay for admission would be almost incredible, were we not aware that in the very same establishments the people are allowed to crowd round the pit-doors an hour or two before they are opened, and then to tumble in and fairly fight with each

other for sitting room upon the few benches mercifully left to them.

There can be no question that the remedy for all this is simple. Let the “pit” mean a certain number of seats announced at the commencement of the season; let every one of these seats be numbered, and the tickets purchased by rotation; and every person visiting the Opera will then have acquired the right to enter the house at whatever time he pleases, and to take his seat without incurring the danger of having the breath almost pressed out of his body.

We have already said that the Opera, although now a popular institution, must always be considered somewhat a luxury; but this does not apply to concerts, which, as we have ample proof in the present day, can be made remunerative at a moderate rate of admission.

The rapid spread of concert music in England is so remarkable, that we cannot help pausing for a moment to trace its history. The writer of these lines having been, about sixteen years ago, amongst the first to advocate the diffusion of good music amongst the people, may be pardoned for taking this opportunity of expressing his gratification at the result, and for adding that in his most sanguine moments he scarcely imagined that such a radical change could be effected in so short a time. At the period in which he wrote, not an orchestral work of any importance could be heard under half-a-guinea, and now there is scarcely one that cannot be heard for a shilling.

To say that the foundation of this democratic movement was laid by the man of the people, M. Jullien, would be untrue, seeing that he was not the first person even to establish “Promenade Concerts” in England; but we cannot deny that he effected very much towards leading the public mind in the right direction, and creating a taste which continued to grow after his influence had ceased.

That M. Jullien was what Mr. Emerson would call a “representative man,” there can be little doubt; but the weak point of his character was the constant intrusion of his *personality* upon the public, so that Beethoven, Mendelssohn, and the other great composers appeared patronizingly led by the hand, and introduced to the public, by M. Jullien, with his wand of office as a sort of Art Lord Chamberlain.

His own opinion too of the position which he held in the estimation of the people led him too often to imagine that he could play with their weakness, when he did not choose to administer to their strength. In proof of this, after having for years devoted himself to assembling huge masses of instrumentalists, regardless of anything like proportion, and creating, in fact, “Monster Concerts,” he actually issued a prospectus, saying that there was nothing like a small orchestra properly balanced, quoting Beethoven’s well-known remark, “Mon rêve du beau pour

l'exécution de mes symphonies, c'est un orchestre de 60 ;" and all this simply because he could not procure one of the large theatres for his concerts, and was obliged to content himself with the Lyceum. Again, nothing could more fully prove his faith in the public credulity than the announcement of his last series of performances "previous to his departure with the *élite* of his orchestra into the capitals and cities of Europe, America, Australia, the Colonies, and civilised towns of Asia and Africa." Some there were, we know, who actually believed this, and conjured up a picture of our favorite clarionet, horn, trombone, and flute players wandering about in Africa, liable at any moment to be seized by wild beasts, or taken prisoner by some roving tribe, and compelled to play savage dances round a fire, on penalty of being eaten. Happily for the "*élite*" of his orchestra, however, the "civilised towns" of Manchester, Liverpool, and some few others, formed the boundary of their wanderings ; and the rest of the world was left in its primitive darkness.

Having disburthened our mind, however, with respect to what we consider the defects of this pioneer of popular music, we have much praise left for him as a man of great energy, and a very able conductor. We have no hesitation in saying that we have heard symphonies go better under his *bâton* than under that of many a conductor of greater pretension ; and although we cannot forgive him for presenting Beethoven's Storm in the Pastoral Symphony with the house darkened, and accompanied with theatrical thunder and lightning, we must not forget that he has nightly braved the hisses of the ignorant in the cause of classical music, and forced them to endure what they have since learned to venerate.

It was not likely, however, that the heterogeneous materials which made up a programme of a "promenade concert" would long satisfy the intelligent few who did not wish to mix their music with conversation and "sherry-cobbler." Many there were who wanted entire classical works, instead of fragments ; and who therefore looked upon gigantic quadrilles—even with an extra military band and novel effects—as an impertinent interruption. As the supply generally keeps pace with the demand, a very short time elapsed before musical entertainments, entirely divested of the "promenade" characteristics, sprang up to meet this improved taste ; whilst the establishment of "music-halls" received the idlers who tried to persuade themselves that lounging away an evening to the sound of music was "going to a concert." About these music-halls we may have something to say on a future occasion : at present we have only to consider the concert-room.

One of the healthy characteristics of the present day is the gradual decline of what may be termed "musical gymnastics." When we read that a violinist will go through a series of won-

derful performances on a "single string," or that a pianist will execute a fantasia "with his left hand alone," we always feel it to be an appeal to the morbid taste of those who attend such dangerous exhibitions, in breathless expectation of a serious accident. Again, solos upon grave instruments, where it is constantly necessary to resort to trickery to produce an effect, only prove that their legitimate powers are not fit for exhibition except in combination with the more acute instruments of an orchestra ; and no feeling, therefore, can be created in an intelligent audience, save wonder at the misplaced power of the executant. All this degrades alike art and artists ; and the sooner, therefore, such exhibitions disappear from our concert-rooms, the better.

What appears to be felt as the great defect by all who are in the habit of attending miscellaneous concerts, is the extreme length of the programme ; and, in many cases, the utter want of method in the arrangement of the pieces. In the best days of the drama, *one* play was acted, upon which the mind of the audience was supposed to be fixed, as the *pièce de resistance* of the evening, a light farce being afterwards given, as refreshing fruit may be leisurely enjoyed after the more solid fare of the table. In a concert, however, we have often two full symphonies, two overtures, two instrumental concertos, with vocal pieces between each ; so that the listener is bewildered in proportion to the intensity of his desire to appreciate ; and he leaves the room in a state of mental exhaustion.

In the arrangement of the various compositions, too, it is very important, for the general effect, that one should be properly contrasted with another. The gardener who plucks the most attractive flowers to form a *bouquet*, does not throw them together in a mass, and rely upon the individual beauty of each to produce effect. He carefully selects them, forms a centre and background, blending, with the skill of an artist, one colour with another, and thus forms a picture remarkable not only for beauty, but for symmetry of arrangement. Why, then, in the construction of a concert, (which may be considered a musical *bouquet*) should not this idea be acted upon ? Why should the mind, any more than the eye, be distracted by want of balance and proportion ?

Were we to form what we should conceive a model programme, we would have one full symphony, two overtures, and one instrumental concerto or solo, interspersed with a few vocal pieces, selected with the utmost care. The attention of an audience could be kept active to the conclusion of a concert like this ; and the feeling created by the performance of one great work would not be destroyed and confused by the performance of another on the same evening. When we say that the vocal pieces should be carefully selected, we mean that such only should be chosen as would be suitable for a concert-room. What

can be more ridiculous than the long solos, duets, and trios, expressive of the most intense love, rage, and despair, cut bodily out of operas, merely to suit the voice or dramatic power of certain vocalists? As well might we read isolated chapters from books, and expect that an audience should enter into the passions and feelings of characters of whom they know nothing but the names.

It may be said that reforms like these cannot be worked out whilst a popular audience desires to have operatic scraps, and would willingly sit through a programme lasting until midnight; but this is merely ministering to an unformed taste, and playing down to the people, instead of raising them up to you. We know that country visitors, for instance, rush to these "Monster Concerts," because they want to see every eminent artist in one night, so that they can make it appear to their friends, on their return, that they have made the round of operas and concerts during their stay in the metropolis; but we do not therefore believe that these annual shows should be perpetuated, nor do we think that they ever produce the slightest feeling for true art amongst the audience. Indeed, the general impression of these performances appears to be summed up in the remark made in our hearing during the last season—"they are fatiguing, but cheap."

"*Multum in parvo*" concerts like these may bring present money to those who institute them; but the same reason has been too often assigned in support of many of the abuses connected with our public entertainments which have since been remedied, to the honour and profit of those who have had the courage to carry out the reforms. Into this question, therefore, it will be unnecessary now to enter. We have in these remarks but one object in view:—to support the highest interests of art, and to aid in educating the public taste to its due appreciation.

WORCESTER AND NORWICH FESTIVALS.

THE Festivals of Worcester and Norwich have this year derived additional interest from the production of two oratorios—one entirely new to the public, and the other having only once been heard during the last season at Exeter Hall. The attention bestowed upon these compositions by every artist concerned in their performance, and the large audiences assembled on each occasion, must amply prove—if proof were wanting—how zealously the members of the profession will work to render justice to a new composer, and how willingly the public will come forth to welcome him.

The attendance at Worcester during the four days of the Festival, commencing on the 8th of September, exceeded by nearly two thousand that of the corresponding days in 1860; a result satisfactorily showing that the love of music and the cause of charity—so long linked in affectionate brotherhood—have rather increased than diminished with the lapse of time.

The Festival was opened on Tuesday with a fine performance of *Elijah*, and the next day was devoted to Mozart's *Requiem*, Beethoven's *Engedi*, or *David in the Wilderness*, (Mount of Olives), and Mendelssohn's *Hymn*

of *Praise*—a programme so long as to weary the attention even of the most zealous worshipper of these great composers.

On the third day, Herr Schachner's Oratorio, *Israel's Return from Babylon*, was produced, the principal singers being Madlle. Tietjens, Miss Palmer, Mr. Sims Reeves, and Mr. Santley.

We cannot say that the composer of this work has had a gracious task to perform in setting to music a *libretto* utterly destitute of human interest; and we must therefore give him credit for having to a certain extent overcome the difficulty, by endeavouring to invest the four parts, into which the work is divided, with a certain distinctive dramatic feeling.

The first part, "Captivity," opens with a short Alto Recitative, leading to an instrumental introduction, the plan of which is, we presume, borrowed from *Elijah*. An Air, Recitative, and Chorus follow, in which the key of E minor is painfully impressed upon the ear—the Tenors and Basses aiding the monotony by holding on the E in unison throughout the chorus; so that, in spite of the modulations given to the brass instruments, we feel a sense of relief when the key-note has finally died away. A Baritone air, with a flowing semiquaver accompaniment, leads to the Chorus, "War against Babylon," which concludes the first part.

In the second part, "Deliverance," we certainly experience a sensation of joy in escaping from the constant prevalence of the minor key; and the Tenor air, "Praise the Lord," seems bright and refreshing, if only from contrast. In the Chorus, "Sound the loud timbrel," we have some effective writing, and an unexpected transition from C to A flat, which same device is strangely enough repeated in the succeeding Soprano solo. The Tenor and Baritone duet, "The Lord has tried his children," is vocal, and well expresses the sentiment of the words. The Soprano cavatina, the Chorus, "Lord, thou rememberest the night," and the Quartett with Chorus, "So when the dread clouds," may be also accepted as favourable specimens of musician-like writing, without, however, raising the mind of the hearer to the devotional feeling of the subject. The third part, the "Reconciliation and Return to Zion," opens with another chorus of Tenors and Basses in unison, the effect of which we cannot admire, although the pitch was excellently sustained by the chorus. The "Evening Hymn" which follows, "Hark! tis the breeze of twilight calling," for Soprano and Tenor, is a strict canon throughout, and is unquestionably the gem of the Oratorio. So pure and melodious is the subject of this Hymn, that we have little doubt of its being detached from the work, and extensively sung in private circles. Passing over two or three pieces which call for no particular remark, we come to the concluding Chorus of the part, "Put on thy strength," in which the composer seems to have seen the necessity of introducing something like a strict *fugue*; and although we cannot say that the attempt is very successful, there is an earnestness of purpose in the writing which at once commands attention, if not admiration. In the last part, "The Promise and Song of Praise," Herr Schachner has again recourse to his unison effects for Tenors and Basses, and the Oratorio concludes with a Chorus in which the "Amen" is lengthened out with a plagal cadence, in the true conventional style of sacred *finales*.

No praise can be too great for all concerned in the execution of this work; and Herr Schachner has no right therefore to complain of his not having had a fair hearing. We admit, as we have before said, that the words of this Oratorio, being selected partly from Scripture and partly from Moore's "Sacred Songs," cannot call forth that unity of design which should animate a composer in his conception of a great work; but, judging it as it stands, we cannot but express surprise that it should have been fairly and freely chosen by those in power from amongst the many compositions of the same kind equally ready and waiting for a verdict.

A performance of the *Messiah* brought the Festival to a